Whether Moral Excellence tend directly to increase Intellectual Power?

First, What is moral excellence? Not, surely, the mere acknowledgement of the divine origin of the scriptures, and obedience to their dictates as such; nor yet an implicit compliance with the requisitions of what may be termed popular morality. It consists rather in allowing the religious sentiment to exercise a natural and proper influence over our lives and conduct — in acting from a sense of duty, or, as we say from principle.

The morally excellent, then, are constantly striving to discover and pursue the right. This is their whole duty; for, in the inquiry what is right, reason alone can decide, and her dictates are ever identical with the dictates of duty. Here then is ample room for the exercise of the intellectual faculties.

What, in fact, is the end of all inquiry but the discovery of truth — of right? The man of the world, no less than the logician, though his objects of pursuit be unworthy a man, is still anxious only to learn the best way to attain them; the degraded and vicious have already discovered the right way to do wrong. Indeed no man ever proves so wholly false to his nature as not to worship truth under some form or other, none so lost to all sense of honesty, as not to contend for, and lay claim to, the right.

The morally right, or true, differs only from the worldly or temporal, in that it is the only real and universal right — that most worthy of man's inquiry and pursuit — the only right recognized by philosophy. As it is the most abstract, so is it the most practical of all, for it admits of universal application.

None, or few, but the highest minds, can attain to moral excellence. With by far the greater part of mankind, religion is a habit, or rather, habit is religion; their views of things are illiberal and contracted, for the very reason that they possess not intellectual power sufficient to attain to moral excellence. However paradoxical it may seem, it appears to me that to reject Religion is the first step towards moral excellence; at least, no man ever attained to the highest degree of of the latter by any other road. Byron's character is a favorite argument with those who maintain the opposite opinion; a better for my own purpose I could not have desired. He advanced just far enough on the road to excellence to depart from the religion of the vulgar, nay further, twelve lines, says Constant, (and he quotes them) of his poetry, contain more true religion than was ever possessed by any or all of his calumniators.

Could infidels but live double the number of years allotted to other mortals, they would become patterns of excellence. So too of all true poets — they would neglect the beautiful for the true.

So far, then, from impeding the development of the Intellectual Powers, Moral Excellence is made the sole pursuit, and is attainable only, by the highest minds.

Thoreau. May 26.-37

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